DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 264 684 EC 181 333

AUTHOR Duncan, Dvenna; And Others
TITLE A Model for Assessment of Classroom Problems. Project ACTIONS.
PUB DATE Mar 85
NOTE 11p.; Paper presented at the Annual National Rural Special Education Conference (5th, Bellingham, WA, March 19-21, 1985).
PUB TYPE Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Guides - Non-Classroom Use (055)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Behavior Modification; *Disabilities; Elementary Secondary Education; *Mainstreaming; Student Evaluation

ABSTRACT

The conference paper examines issues in observing and programing for mainstreamed handicapped children. The underlying cause of the academic or behavioral deficit is usually ascribed to one of three categories: (1) lack of prerequisite skills; (2) lack of motivation; or (3) lack of physical ability to perform the behavior necessary to demonstrate mastery of the skill. Each of the categories is addressed in terms of identification and treatment. Attention is given to ways to reduce inappropriate behaviors in mainstreamed children and to replace the problem behaviors with more appropriate ones. Principles of behavior are reviewed, and three purposes of behaviors are considered: attention, avoidance of task, and self stimulation. Intervention suggestions are noted. (CL)

While making the observation and collecting the necessary data, it is important that the observer structure the observation in such a way as to be able to make preliminary judgements as to the underlying cause of the academic or behavioral deficit.

ACADEMIC DEFICITS

The underlying cause of an academic deficit will generally fit into one of the three categories listed below:

1. Lack of prerequisite skills
2. Lack of motivation
3. Lack of physical ability to perform the behavior necessary to demonstrate mastery of the skill

Since the academic product resulting from any of the above deficits may be identical and the remediation program for each is different, it is essential for effective programming that the discern the specific cause for the academic deficit.

Lack of Prerequisite Skills The lack of prerequisite skills should always be considered first when evaluating an academic problem in the mainstream classroom. A student who is experiencing a problem in two place multiplication, for example, very likely may have mathematical skill problems in number facts or place value. In this case continued programming on two place multiplication without remediation of the prerequisite skill problem will most likely result in extreme frustration on the part of the teacher and the student.

Prerequisite skill analysis can best be accomplished by the

use of a standardized programming planning test or a teacher designed informal assessment system consisting of task analyses of the deficit skills. For students with widespread academic deficits a general cognitive assessment such as the Woodcock-Johnson Psychoeducational Battery should be administered. By analyzing the cluster scores from this test information can be gained about the general verbal ability, reasoning, memory and perceptual speed of the learner.

If a prerequisite skill deficit is identified as the cause of the academic deficit, program goals for supplemental work must focus upon the prerequisite skill rather than continuing efforts on the more advanced program. For example a student with no effective word attack skills should not continue with fourth grade reading seat work sheets.

Lack of Motivation If the lack of prerequisite skills has been ruled out as the cause of the academic deficit, with methods outlined above, the next step for the consultant is to examine the motivational system in place for both the classroom as a whole and for the specific student in question. The student may have acquired the ability to perform the task, but not be receiving the necessary reinforcement to maintain that behavior within the mainstream classroom structure. If the student makes many performance errors on assessments and in daily assignments, motivation should be considered as a probable deficit area.

Since it is not realistic to expect the mainstream classroom teacher to charge his/her classroom management system to fit the needs of one pupil, supplemental program goals for the student

with motivational deficits must consist of developing programs which will teach the student to be self-motivating or to find the motivational system existing within the mainstream classroom.

Many students who have spent a great deal of their academic time in special education classrooms have received a majority of their programming in a 1-1 fashion at the acquisition level. Thus the student has not learned to self-reinforce and self-check. This type of programming may make the student very teacher dependent, an ineffective behavior in mainstream classrooms, especially in the upper grades. When the heavily reinforced special education class student is placed in the mainstream many academic gains disappear because the student has not been given the tools to maintain these gains with the decreased motivational system.

Lack of Physical Ability to Perform the Skill Necessary to Demonstrate the Task An often overlooked deficit ,especially at the middle and secondary school level is a lack of physical ability to perform the skill necessary to demonstrate mastery of the task. A student does not have to be noticably physically handicapped for this problem to exist. For example, a student may have the academic knowledge and cognitive skill to solve three place multiplication problems but cannot write digits fast enough to adequately demonstrate this knowledge to the teacher on daily assignments or on assessment instruments.

A preliminary assessment for this deficit is to examine the work products of the students in question. A student who completes 25 out of 100 problems on a mathematics assignment and gets all 25 correct is certainly different from a student who completes all 100, with only 25 correct. The former student may

simply be unable to write digits fast enough to meet criteria. Continued work on facts will not remediate this problem. Further analysis at this point would involve asking the student to write digits as fast as he could. In secondary subjects such as science, history, etc, lack of handwriting speed may so interfere with note taking as to severely retard student acquisition of subject material.

After determining lack of physical ability to perform the task to be the underlying cause of the academic deficit a further assessment must be undertaken. The determination must be made as to whether practice on the skill will remediate the deficit, or if the physical skill performance is beyond the capabilities of the referred pupil. If the latter is determined to be the case, the specialist must design alternative strategies which are under the control of the student. For example, if it is determined that the student is failing in science because his writing speed is so deficit that he cannot take notes and that the student is physically incapable of writing faster borrowing notes from another student would not be a long range solution. The student in this case would continue to be dependent upon others. A better solution is to teach the student the efficient use of a tape recorder, or other recording devise under his/her control.

BEHAVIORAL PROBLEMS

In the previous sections of this chapter we have been discussing ways to add behavior to the repertoire of a student. However, many students are having difficulty in the regular classroom due to an excess, rather than an absence of behaviors. This student is usually labeled as behavior disordered, emotionally disturbed or by many teachers "a pain in the neck". In order to successfully mainstream these students it is necessary to help the student to reduce these inappropriate behaviors and to replace them with appropriate classroom behaviors.

In order to successfully engage in this task it is necessary for the teacher to understand some principles of behavior. The first of these principles is that all behavior is maintained by reinforcement. This reinforcement may be positive. That is the student receives a consequence which is desirable to him as a result of engaging in the behavior. The reinforcement may also be negative. When a behavior is maintained by negative reinforcement, the student engages in the behavior to avoid a consequence which he/she finds undesirable. An example of a positive reinforcer would be receiving extra freetime for finishing all papers early. An example of negative reinforcement would be finishing all papers to avoid detention. Positive reinforcement is usually more effective in the maintenance of appropriate behaviors. A review of the maintenance stage of learning helps in the understanding of this principle. In order to maintain a behavior the student must develop a self-reinforcing system. It

is certainly more likely that the student will engage in self positive reinforcement than self negative reinforcement. This same principle helps to explain why the effects of punishment are not long lasting and do not maintain without the potential punisher present.

When a student is deciding between two behaviors, the factor guiding that decision will be the students perceived view of the relative strength of the reinforcers for engaging in each behavior and will choose to do the behavior with the stronger reinforcer whether that be positive or negative. Thus, in order to encourage students to engage in appropriate classroom activities the teacher must be sure that appropriate behaviors receive stronger reinforcement than inappropriate classroom behaviors. An inappropriate behavior which occurs very often in classrooms is "talking out" or not raising the hand and waiting to be called on. This behavior persists in many classrooms because the teacher inadvertantly provides stronger reinforcement for talking out than for raising hands. The "talking out" student may receive a mild negative consequence but usually receives the answer to his question or praise for his response to the question. The "hand raiser" does not receive the mild negative consequence, but also does not receive the positive consequences received by the "talk out" behavior.

Negative behaviors usually occur in the classroom for one of three reasons:

1. To get attention
2. To get out of a task
3. For self-stimulatory purposes.

When planning remediation programs it may be more important to determine the purpose of the behavior than to describe the actual behavior being emitted. A specific behavior may be used for all three purposes. The following discussion of the three purposes listed above will assist the teacher in writing behavior programs.

ATTENTION GETTING BEHAVIORS: Many behaviors occur in classrooms with the goal of getting attention from the teacher or peers. As the child progresses into the upper grades the goal is more likely to be peer attention than teacher attention. These behaviors occur when the teacher or peers (which ever is the attention getting target) are not attending to the student in question. An attention getting behavior with the teacher as a target will not occur during the time the student is receiving academic instruction from the teacher. However, peer attention getting behaviors will occur at this time. It is possible even likely, that a student with many inappropriate regular classroom behaviors will be a model student in the special education classroom where 1-1 instruction is the rule. If this situation occurs the teacher attempting to modify the behavior in the regular classroom should begin programming with the assumption that getting teacher attention is the behavior goal.

Modifying teacher attention is much easier than modifying peer attention. In order to effectively help the student experiencing behavior problems of this type, peer cooperation will be necessary. The rule of thumb to follow in identifying attention getting behaviors is that they will occur most often while the

student is not being attented to and will cease when attention is given.

Effective remediation for these behaviors involves the removal of attention for the inappropriate behavior and more important teaching the student appropriate ways in which to get attention. Too often the teacher is so relieved when the attention-getter is being appropriate, that she/he forgets to reinforce appropriate behaviors.

GETTING OUT OF TASK BEHAVIORS: The goal of a these behaviors is the avoidance of an undesired task. The "getting out of task" student will engage in inappropriate behavior many times to focus the teacher's attention away from the academic task at hand onto the behavior emitted. This is a frequent goal of the learning disabled student as he/she is more comfortable with the focus being upon inappropriate behavior than upon his/herinability to perform the required task. If the teacher mistakes this behavior for an attention getting behavior and delivers a consequence to the student such as having him/her sit down or even leave the room, the student's goal has been obtained and it is likely that the next time he/she is in an uncomfortable situation academically the same type of behavior will occur. This is nonproductive for the teacher, the entire class and most certainly for the target student.

Effective remediation for getting out of task behaviors is to ensure that the student does not meet the behavior goal of getting out of the task and to focus programming efforts on remediation of the academic behaviors causing the problem. These behaviors can be recognized most easily because they do not occur

when the student is not required to demonstrate academic ability only in order to avoid the perceived embarrassing consequence of demonstrating lack of knowledge to the teacher and to the class. The teacher can avoid many of these situations by not placing learning disabled students in types of situations which would cause this behavior.

SELF STIMULATORY BEHAVIORS: Self stimulatory behaviors are most often thought of in relation to severely retarded and emotionally disturbed students. However, they do occur in all students. The more normal individual simply engages in more socially acceptable self stimulatory behaviors and usually does not let these behaviors interfer with learning. When a self stimulatory behavior is interfering with learning, remediation involves the giving of a stronger reinforcer for the desired behavior. Thus when given a choice between self stimulatory behavior and the teacher targeted behavior the student will choose the teacher targeted behavior because of the stronger reinforcement.

All behavior remediation programs will be more effective with mainstreamed students when the above principles are taken into account while programming.